



Vote 1 Public Education

This year's federal election comes at a critical time for public education in Australia. Here's what is needed.



A new schools funding system

The current schools funding system – now under review – must change to properly and more equitably fund public education. Australia needs a schools funding policy that ensures the right of every family to:

- a well resourced high quality public school in their community
- sufficient qualified teachers and staff to meet the needs of students
- a broad curriculum of the highest quality, and
- a safe, modern 21st century learning environment.



A long-term Indigenous education plan

Our nation must commit to a 25 year, intergenerational plan for Indigenous education.

This means funding and supporting an Indigenous Education Action Plan with shorter term targets, annual reporting on a full range of indicators and a major review every five years to ensure initiatives are improving educational outcomes.



Early childhood education for all

Quality early childhood education considerably enhances a child's prospects of educational achievement and success in later life. It is a powerful tool for educational and social equity.

In the two years before school starts, all children must have access to quality public early childhood education for 20 hours a week taught by a four-year-qualified teacher.



No league tables

The next government must ensure that school test results cannot be published as league tables.

Publicly ranking schools in league tables based on test scores is misleading and damaging to students, school communities and quality education.



Urgent investment in TAFE

TAFE's government funding has been declining for more than a decade. Yet this world class TAFE system delivers high quality education and training to almost 1.7 million students a year.

TAFE funding must be urgently increased to meet the demand for higher level skills across the workforce.

TAFE requires a minimum investment of \$200 million a year until 2020 to meet Government targets for higher workforce qualifications.

You decide.

We asked the Labor Party, the Coalition and the Greens to explain the key elements of their education policies.

The Australian Labor Party



Since 2007 the Government has been delivering real change for Australian education after more than a decade of federal neglect and division.

Our commitment is to deliver on high expectations for every student, whatever their background and to help tackle barriers to achievement like disadvantage.

Our reforms and investments extend from the early years to TAFE and universities.

We have set challenging goals and we have delivered record investment in teachers, students and educational facilities.

Early childhood education

We are working with States and Territories to deliver access for every child to 15 hours a week of high quality pre-school by 2013.

We are building 38 new Early Learning Centres, training more early years teachers, providing more financial support for parents and lifting quality

standards through better staff ratios and qualifications.

School curriculum

The Australian national curriculum for English, maths, science and history has been successfully drafted with the input of teachers, parents and experts. It will be implemented in schools beginning next year. Development of other subjects including geography, arts and languages will continue.

School Assessment

The My School website has achieved unprecedented transparency in Australian schools. It has been challenging, but it has prompted a new level of conversation across Australia about what is happening in schools and how student achievement can be improved.

We will add new information to My School, including data about school income by the end of 2010 and new information about student progress and family characteristics. These additions will give an even better picture of the context in which schools are working and school improvement over time.

School Funding

We have committed a record \$63.7 billion to Australian schools for 2009-12. Australian Government Funding to public schools is 130 per cent higher than during the previous four years.

This commitment is supporting:

Trade Training Centres, giving every secondary school the chance develop or refurbish a trade training facility.

Smarter Schools National Partnerships, helping 2,564 schools to improve outcomes for nearly 800,000 students by focusing on:

The Coalition



The Coalition has a simple and effective plan for education: we want to empower school principals and school communities to make more of the decisions currently made for them by state government bureaucracies. The Coalition isn't trying to dazzle with a rhetoric revolution. Rather, by letting schools manage more themselves, we believe we can improve education outcomes for students.

Schools funding

A school community is best placed to decide what infrastructure it needs – be it computers, sporting equipment or a new building. We support choice and community action. When Labor came to government they cancelled the very popular Investing in Our Schools programme, which allowed schools to decide what they needed to enhance student learning. This programme included computers and delivered many to numerous schools over the

continues on page 12

The Greens

years. It also included refurbishment, new play equipment, or even a new building, depending on the needs and wishes of the school. When returned to Government, the Coalition will not take BER monies away from schools, but will instead ensure that they go directly to school communities for them to decide how it is to be spent. It will not be handed over to state governments.

Curriculum

We are concerned that the national curriculum is being politicised by stealth. There has been no significant public consultation on the three cross-curriculum perspectives. At no point were parents or other interested parties consulted, when they arguably should have been. The Coalition will ensure that alternatives are duly considered, such as, for example, a practical cross-curricular theme of preparing students to face the challenges of life and work in the twenty-first century.

Assessment and Reporting

If elected the Coalition would examine introducing an annual national test for students to measure improvement in students, thus, giving parents, teachers and government a better understanding of how students and schools are progressing. Second, we would commence a revision of the MySchool website, primarily to publish overall school improvement rather than just raw test results. Finally, we would work with the states to unshackle school principals from overbearing bureaucracies, thereby allowing them to respond better to the results of national testing and to act to improve their own school communities.

continues on page 12



Schools are the foundation of Australian communities, but we don't seem willing to give them credit for the benefits they provide and invest in them appropriately.

To help kids reach their full potential, not just as workers, consumers and taxpayers, the Australian Greens believe we need a well-rounded, well-resourced education system that does not discriminate based on where students live or what their parents earn.

We need a system where schools are treated as essential institutions at the heart of every Australian community, a system where kids are valued, teachers are given proper support and acknowledgment for the work they do, and parents feel engaged by the system, not ignored. If we are serious about making Australia's education system world-class, we need to focus on these elements – valuing kids, supporting teachers and engaging parents.

The Federal Government is reviewing its federal funding model – the Greens'

policy calls for a new fairer model including a significant investment in public education. We have moved to amend the Schools Assistance Act 2008 to place a two-year limit on continuing funding under the SES system.

Our curriculum policy calls for expert decision-making in consultation with teachers, parents, students and the community. The Greens are concerned with the Government's implementation of the national curriculum and we support calls for better support, training and time for schools and teachers.

The Greens have already announced three election policy initiatives for supporting public schools and teachers:

- A scholarship program to address the need for more teachers and to raise the profile of teaching as a profession;
- A mentoring program where new teachers can benefit from more experienced members of the profession; and
- A school's community fund where public schools can apply for funding for student well-being and support services.

The Greens have supported the campaign against an assessment and reporting regime that results in league tables and the naming and shaming of schools.

We support the provision of useful and meaningful information on schools, not the misleading and confusing information available so far on the My School website.

Quality education – and in particular, teacher performance – cannot be measured with one-off test scores. This is why we initiated a Senate Inquiry into the assessment and reporting regime.

It's clear that Indigenous education needs a significant increase in funding.

continues on page 13

The Australian Labor Party

continued from page 10

- Literacy and numeracy, including specialist coaches and whole school improvement strategies.
- low SES school communities, including paying outstanding teachers more to work in the classrooms where they will make most difference and building stronger partnerships with local communities.

A review of schools funding beyond 2012 will make recommendations next year on how to fund schools fairly and effectively, including how to promote world class educational outcomes and tackle barriers to achievement like disadvantage and disability.

Quality Teaching

The Quality Teaching National Partnership is delivering new professional standards and the chance for teachers to apply for highly accomplished status.

A new Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership will support excellence and professional development among teachers and school leaders.

Teachers and schools are being rewarded for great performance and excellent teachers are being recognised for teaching in the classrooms where they can add most value. We will continue with these reforms.

Indigenous Education

We are implementing a four-year action plan with state and territory governments to close the education gap on Indigenous disadvantage focused on school attendance, partnership with parents, literacy and numeracy and quality teaching.

We are supporting Dr Chris Sarra's Stronger Smarter Institute to work with schools to boost the achievement of indigenous students.

At least 35 Children and Family Centres are being established across Australia to offer early learning, child care and family support programs.

Training and TAFE

We are supporting more than 711,000 training places across the economy, many of which are being delivered through TAFE.

Through the Skills for Sustainable Growth package announced in the last Budget we are investing to help Australia's largest vocational education providers, including TAFEs, improve the quality of skills training and expanding access to literacy, numeracy and basic skills training. A new national regulator for the VET sector will start work next year.

We are renewing TAFE facilities and Community Education through record Commonwealth investment in capital and training infrastructure. ●

The Coalition

continued from page 11

Indigenous education

Our priority for Indigenous education is to improve attendance levels and support students as they move into secondary and further education. Education provides Australians with opportunities, and students who live in rural and remote areas should be afforded the same opportunities as city-dwelling Australians.

TAFE

High quality vocational education and training is vital to ensure that Australia has the skilled workforce we need to take our economy forward. To this end, the former Howard Government took significant steps to elevate the value of vocational education, training and apprenticeships. A future Coalition Government will renew this commitment to quality vocational education and training.

Early childhood education

The Coalition will review early childhood education and, in close consultation with the States, will look to introduce universal subsidized early childhood education for all Australians. Ideally, we would like to see all children be given a minimum of 10 hours a week in an accredited centre, taught by qualified teachers. ●

Election 2010

...you decide



We also recognise that educational opportunities and outcomes for Indigenous students are linked to a range of other factors and we are committed to tackling Indigenous disadvantage across the board.

Our education policy provides strong support for TAFE as the primary means of providing vocational education and training. We do not support attempts to undermine or weaken the public TAFE system.

Early childhood education is a vital element of lifelong learning. The Greens want to see early childhood education and care transformed from a costly, corporate-run afterthought into a high quality, affordable, accessible service for all. We have already announced a plan for a Capital Grants Fund to boost not-for-profit and community childcare providers.

Our complete education policy can be found at www.greens.org.au. ●

Vote for public education



Policy statements from political parties are often revealing for what they don't say.

In this election year, the Coalition's Plan for Education is silent on the biggest issue of all – the annual funding of our public schools.

It is not that they don't have a position on this: they have chosen not to mention it here.

The Coalition's leaders have said on a number of occasions – including at the National Public Education Forum in March – that they are committed to keeping the SES funding model introduced by the Howard Government.

The Opposition Education spokesman, Christopher Pyne, told the Christian Schools Policy National Forum in May that the Howard Government was a great friend of the private school sector and, if elected, a new Coalition government will “take up the reins where the Howard Government left off”.

That is despite the fact the SES funding system has been widely criticised as inequitable and unsustainable, delivering up to \$7,000 a year per private school

student compared to \$1,000 a year per public school student. In addition, deals struck by the Howard Government mean that half of all private schools receive more funding than they are entitled to.

By contrast Labor and the Greens are committed to change when it comes to school funding. Labor has begun a review of the current system and an expert group it has established will make recommendations on a new funding model next year.

The Greens' policy calls for a new funding model, including a significant investment in public education.

Another key commitment the Coalition have omitted is their announcement in May to cut \$3.1 billion from the education budget. Those cuts will mean 120,000 secondary students will miss out on laptop computers and 900 schools will miss out on trades training facilities.

Building the Education Revolution (BER) funding for primary schools will not be cut but will be directed to schools instead of via state or territory governments. Any savings that result may be kept by the government, Mr Pyne said in June.

The AEU has strongly criticised these proposed cuts and the failure of the Coalition to commit to abolishing the SES funding model.

The other major issue of contention is the reporting of NAPLAN results. Labor has promised only to add new information by the end of the year to the My School website including school income and details of student progress and family characteristics.

The Coalition has promised a review of the My School website and a switch in focus from raw test results to overall school improvement.

However, it has also flagged a major extension of national testing to cover all students annually – a position that would not be supported by the AEU. ●